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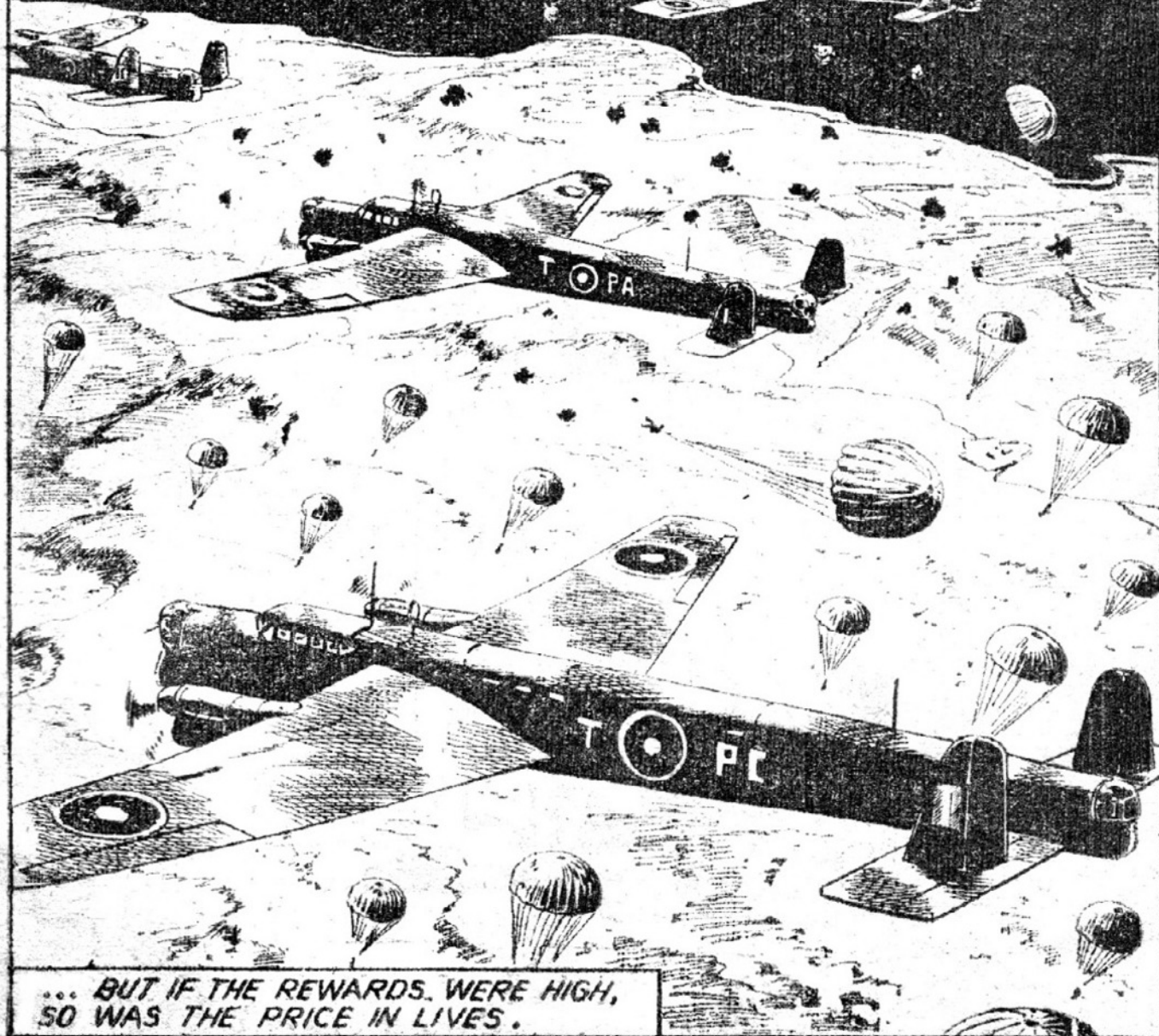
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# AIRBORNE

OF ALL THE FEATS OF HEROISM THAT BLAZED A VICTORY IN THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN NONE FIRED THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE FIGHTING ALLIES AS DID THOSE OF THE MAGNIFICENT PARACHUTE TROOPERS - THE RED DEVILS OF THE SKIES, DROPPING IN CALCULATED FURY UPON ROMMEL'S CRUMBLING FORCES AT TUNIS.



... BUT IF THE REWARDS WERE HIGH,  
SO WAS THE PRICE IN LIVES.



## Chapter 1. PARACHUTE TRAINEE

AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED THE CALL FOR MORE PARATROOP VOLUNTEERS, THERE CAME FROM A LONDON REGIMENT, AN EX-BARGEE BOY, FRANKIE SMALL. LIKE HIS NAME, FRANKIE WAS SMALL IN EVERYTHING BUT HIS HEART, WHICH NOW SWELLED EVEN BIGGER AT BEING ACCEPTED FOR TRAINING AT THE CENTRAL PARACHUTE SCHOOL, ENGLAND.

... REMEMBER, IF THE COURSE GETS TOO ROUGH FOR YOU — THEN SAY SO AND WE'LL RETURN YOU TO YOUR UNIT AND NO HARD FEELINGS. THERE'S NO ROOM HERE FOR A MAN WHO KIDS HIMSELF HE'S TOUGH WHEN HE'S NOT. HE WON'T BE THAT WAY FOR LONG — HE'LL BE DEAD!





LEFT TO THE SERGEANT'S LOVING CARE, FRANKIE AND HIS FELLOW-VOLUNTEERS GOT THEIR FIRST FLAVOUR OF THINGS TO COME.

... AND IF T'PARACHUTE DON'T OPEN WE DO NOT GIVE THEE A NEW ONE, WE GIVE THEE T'BIG STICK FOR CARELESSNESS. AND STAND THEE TO ATTENTION WHEN I'M SPEAKING!



SOON TRAINING BEGAN IN EARNEST. JUMPING FROM MOVING TRUCKS TAUGHT THEM HOW TO FALL AND ROLL.

JUMP!  
FEET TOGETHER!  
LIVELY NOW!





CALLED HOME FROM ACTIVE PARACHUTE SERVICE IN TUNISIA, CAPTAIN ROB STEWART HAD THROWN HIMSELF INTO THE URGENT TRAINING OF FRESH VOLUNTEERS. AND NOW THIS YOUNG SCOT RAN AN EXPERIENCED EYE OVER HIS CHARGES ...

A SUCCESSFUL PARACHUTIST MUST BE TOPS IN MIND AND BODY. PHYSIQUE ISN'A' SO IMPORTANT AS CHARACTER AND COMMON SENSE. YOU GIVE US A REET TOUGH SPIRIT AND WE'LL GIVE YOU A REET TOUGH BODY.



MIDLAND-BORN SERGEANT SAM SPIGGOTT HAD BEEN ROB STEWART'S FAITHFUL SHADOW IN EVERY CAMPAIGN. HE REVELLED NOW IN THE THOUGHT OF CURDLING THESE RECRUITS WITH HAIR-RAISING TALES OF PARATROOP FIGHTING.

CARRY ON, SERGEANT.

VERY GOOD, SIR.





THEN CAME GRUELLING HOURS OF PRACTICE WITH MOCK-UP FUSELAGES, PHYSICAL TRAINING AND UNARMED COMBAT. FRANKIE TRIED THE TRAPEZE UNDER ROB STEWART'S WATCHFUL EYE.





ONLY A MINORITY SURVIVED THE RIGOROUS TRAINING AND MOVED ON TO THE NEXT STAGE - THE JUMP FROM A CAPTIVE BALLOON. TO FRANKIE, THE ENTHUSIASTIC YOUNG CAPTAIN BELOW WAS FAST BECOMING A TYRANT.



THEN CAME THE DAY THEY HAD ALL BEEN TENSELY AWAITING - THE FIRST JUMP FROM AN OPERATIONAL AIRCRAFT.

I'VE GOT BUTTERFLIES IN ME STOMACH!

BUTTERFLIES! I'VE GOT A FLOCK OF SWALLOWS!

COME ALONG, LOOK SLIPPY!



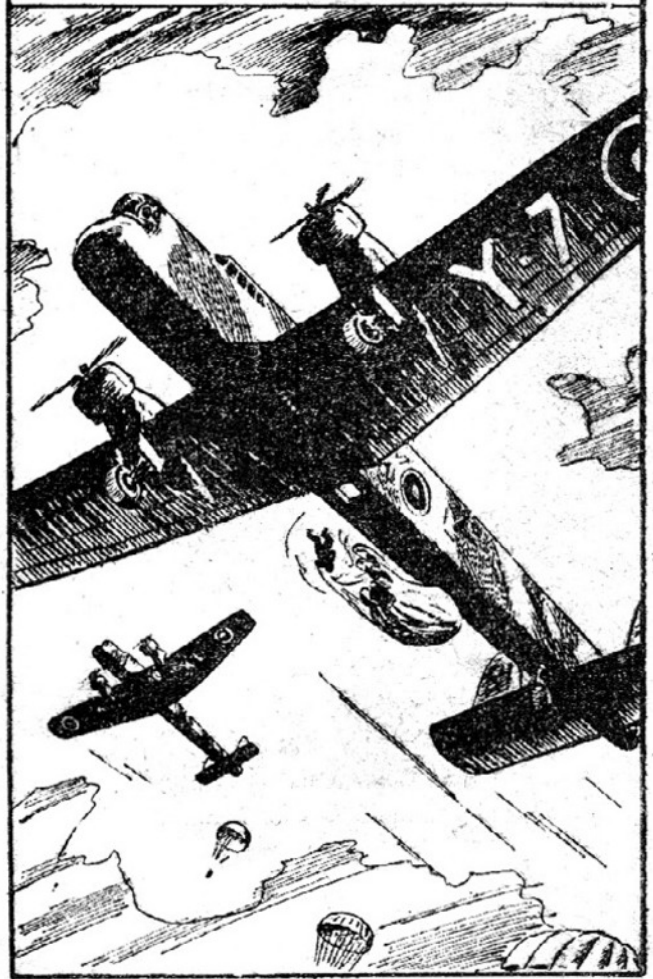


WITH ALL ABOARD, THE AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF AND FLEW OUT TO SEA AND THEN MADE A MOCK ATTACK ON THE COAST. SOON THE NERVOUSLY WAITING TRAINEES WERE GIVEN THE "READY" SIGNAL.

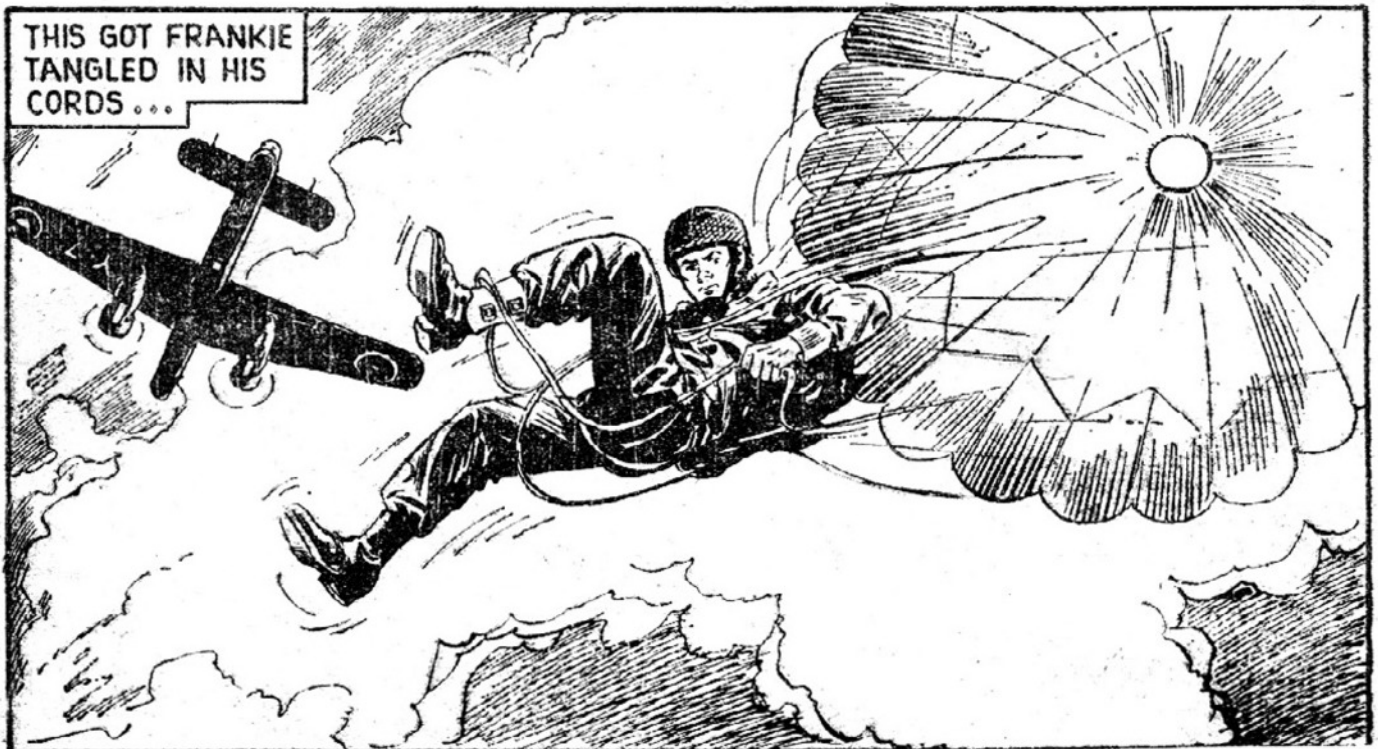
OKAY - FIRST MAN, JUMP!  
TAKE YOUR TIME AND TAKE  
IT EASY!



WHEN FRANKIE'S TURN CAME HE JUMPED ALL RIGHT, BUT MADE THE MISTAKE OF SOMERSAULTING.

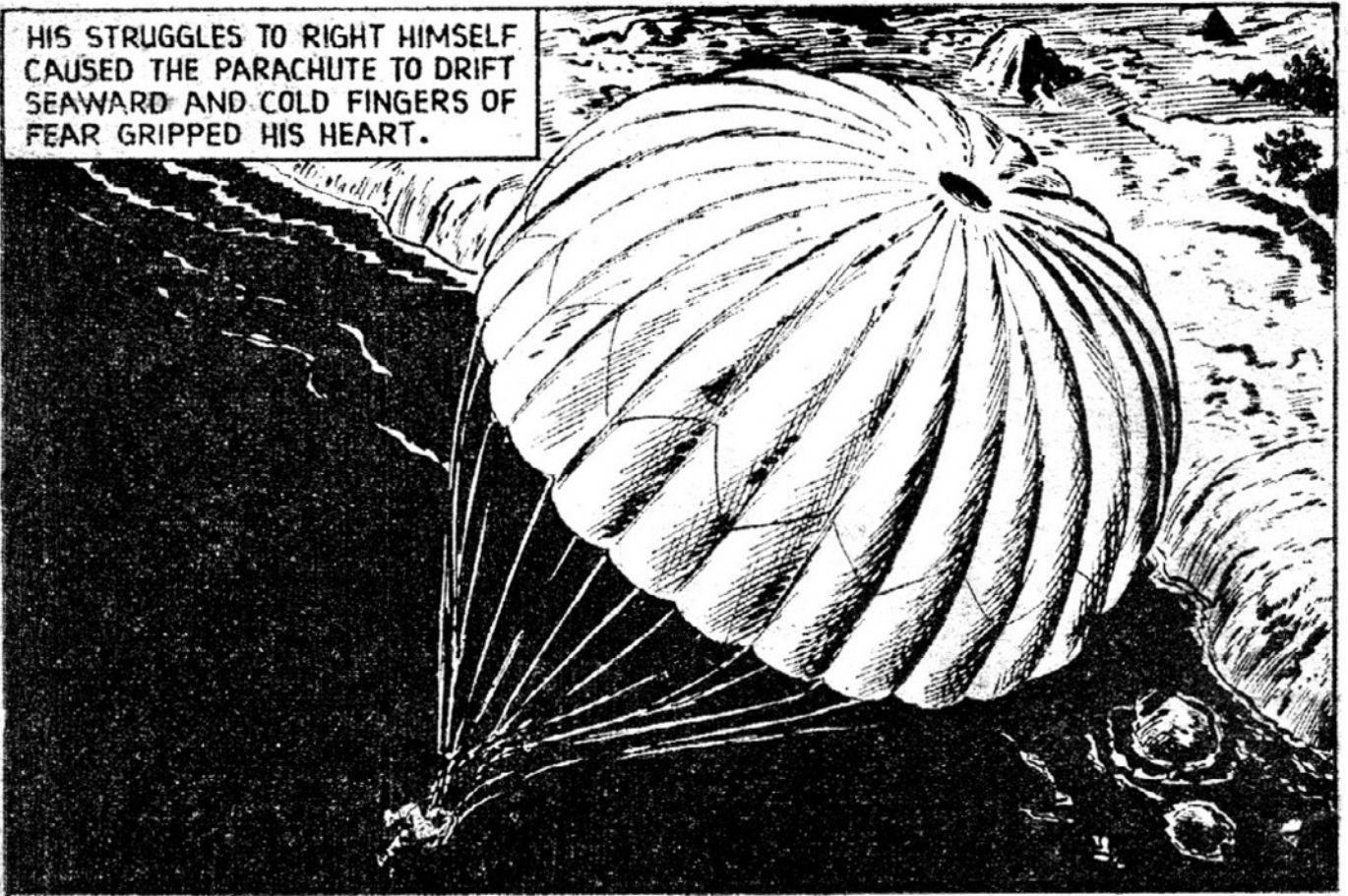


THIS GOT FRANKIE  
TANGLED IN HIS  
CORDS...





HIS STRUGGLES TO RIGHT HIMSELF CAUSED THE PARACHUTE TO DRIFT SEAWARD AND COLD FINGERS OF FEAR GRIPPED HIS HEART.



FRANKIE HAD NEVER OVERCOME A CHILDHOOD TERROR OF THE DEEP SEA SINCE THE TIME HE FELL FROM HIS FATHER'S BARGE AND NEARLY DROWNED. NOW, WITH A CRY OF REAL DISTRESS, HE FELT THE COLD EMBRACE OF THE GREY WATERS.

BEFORE FRANKIE COULD USE HIS KNIFE HE WAS PULLED UNDER BY THE PARACHUTE. THERE BEGAN A NIGHTMARE STRUGGLE...



RACKED WITH PAIN FROM HIS AGONISED LUNGS HE KICKED AWAY THE LAST CLINGING STRANDS AND SOMEHOW SURFACED...

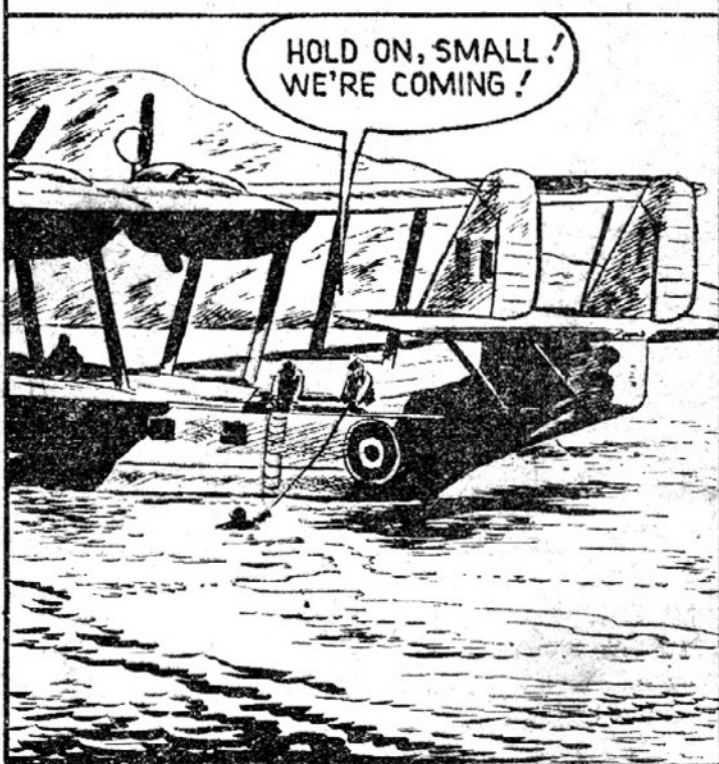




BUT SUCH WAS THE DISCIPLINE ALREADY INGRAINED THAT FRANKIE FOUGHT HIS PANIC AND TRIED TO LIE FLAT AND STILL ON THE WATER. EVEN SO CAME THE DREAD THOUGHT THAT HIS LAST HOURS HAD COME...



KEEPING AFLOAT BY SOME MIRACLE, FRANKIE ALMOST BURST INTO TEARS OF RELIEF AS A COASTAL COMMAND FLYING BOAT SWOOPED DOWN ON TO THE SEA CLOSE BY. ROB STEWART, WHO HAD SEEN THE ACCIDENT, HAD COME SWIFTLY TO THE RESCUE...



STEWART DID NOT REALISE THE SHOCK THIS HAD BEEN TO FRANKIE...

I DIDNA KEN YOU WERE A DEEP-SEA DIVER!



WHILE THE YOUNG OFFICER'S SYMPATHY WAS REAL IT HAD A TINGE OF TOUGHNESS.

JUST BAD LUCK, SMALL ... BUT IN PARACHUTING THERE ARE WORSE THINGS THAN WATER!



IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS FRANKIE MADE SEVERAL GOOD DROPS, BUT HE HAD NOT FORGOTTEN HIS ORDEAL WHEN THE DAY CAME THAT THRILLED THE WHOLE UNIT...

YOU WILL BE FLOWN TO TUNIS WHERE YOU WILL PREPARE FOR A PARACHUTE ATTACK ON TARGETS IN SICILY IN PREPARATION FOR THE EIGHTH ARMY INVASION OF THAT COUNTRY.





ON THE TRIP OUT FRANKIE FELT KEYED UP TO DO HIS BEST BUT HE COULD NOT RID HIMSELF OF THE THOUGHT OF HIS RECENT FRIGHT. TWICE NOW IN HIS LIFETIME HE HAD KNOWN THE FEEL OF DROWNING ...

GUESS I'VE GOT A HOODOO ABOUT WATER!



THEY ARRIVED AT TUNIS WHERE THEY BECAME CAUGHT UP IN THE TREMENDOUS PREPARATIONS FOR THE INVASION OF SICILY. FRANKIE'S FIRST SHOCK WAS TO FIND THAT THEY WERE TO USE A DIFFERENT AIRCRAFT — AMERICAN DAKOTAS.

LUMME, AMERICAN DAKOTAS! THAT MEANS WE'LL HAVE TO DROP OUT OF THE DOOR!

THAT'S RIGHT, FRANKIE. THERE'S NO HOLE IN THE FLOOR OF THEM! THINGS!



## Chapter 2. INTO BATTLE

A FEW DAYS LATER ALL WAS READY AND THEY WERE BRIEFED BY STEWART.

SICILY

WE TAKE OFF JUST BEFORE DAWN FOR SICILY. OUR OBJECTIVE IS AN IMPORTANT BRIDGE OVER A CANAL. WE SHALL CAPTURE THIS BRIDGE AND KEEP POSSESSION SO THAT WHEN THE INVADING EIGHTH ARMY APPEARS IT CAN MOVE ON WITHOUT LOSS OF TIME.



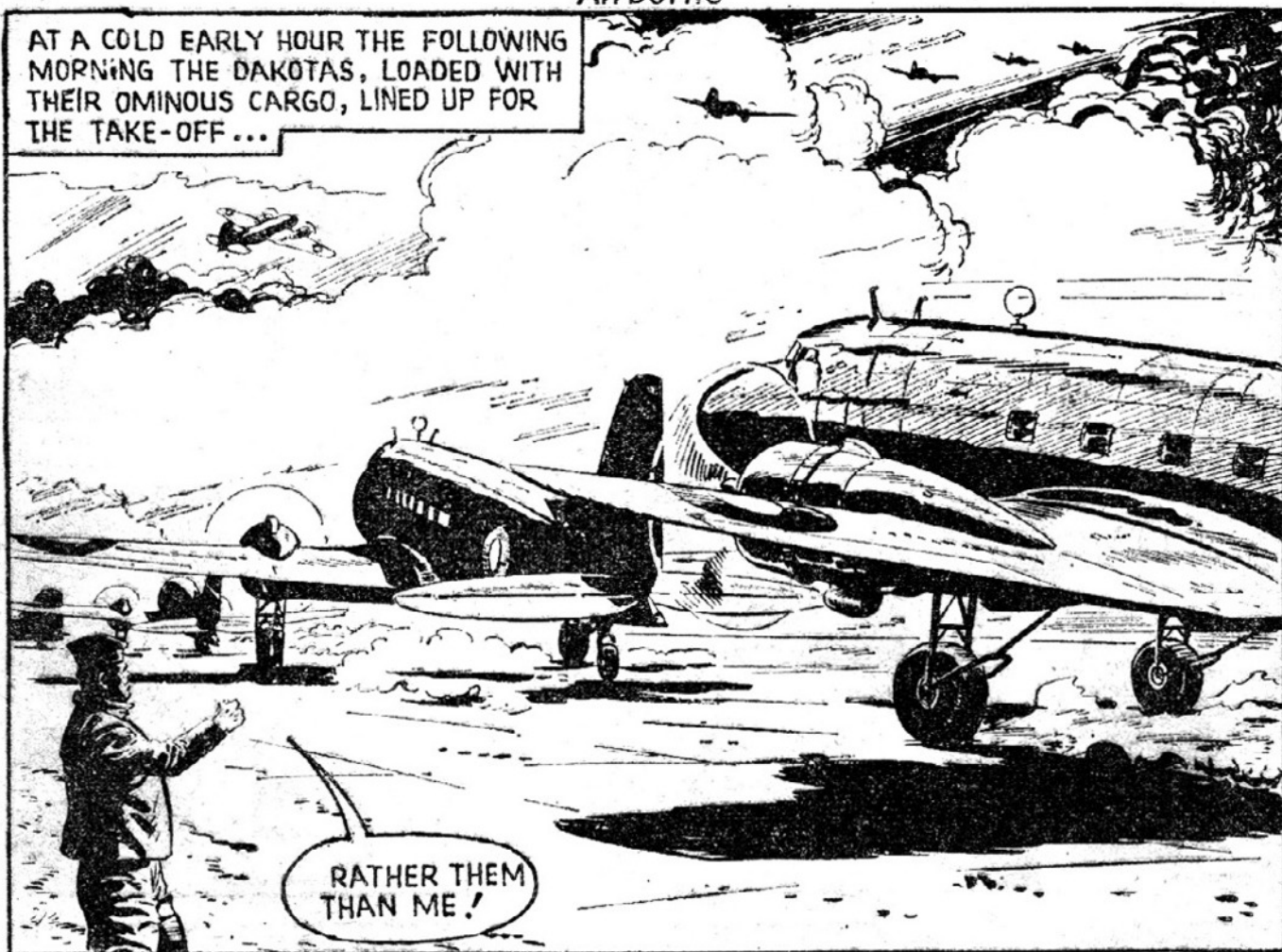
I SHALL DROP WITH THE MAIN ATTACK. SERGEANT SPIGGOTT WILL DROP WITH THE AMMO PARTY.

KEEP YOUR EYES STUCK ON ME, AND DO NOWT TILL I TELL THEE!





AT A COLD EARLY HOUR THE FOLLOWING MORNING THE DAKOTAS, LOADED WITH THEIR OMINOUS CARGO, LINED UP FOR THE TAKE-OFF ...



ALREADY SOBERED BY THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES THE NERVES OF THE YOUNG PARATROOPERS WERE FURTHER STRAINED BY THE NAVY, WHO MISTOOK THE DAKOTAS IN THE EARLY LIGHT FOR ENEMY AIRCRAFT.



TENSE WITH INACTION,  
FRANKIE ENVIED CAPTAIN  
STEWART, WHO WAS IN  
HIGH SPIRITS...

ONCE THE ENEMY GETS WIND OF  
THE INVASION, HE'LL TRY TO  
BLOW UP THE BRIDGE. OCH! BUT  
WE'LL SOON STOP THAT  
LITTLE GAME!



JUST BEFORE SUNRISE THE  
TARGET WAS REACHED AND  
A STIR RAN THROUGH  
STEWART'S AIRCRAFT AS HE  
WATCHED OTHER DAKOTAS  
SHEDDING THEIR MEN...

NOW IT'S  
OUR TURN!

JAKE!





THE DAKOTA CIRCLED OVER THE DROPPING ZONE AND ONE BY ONE ROB STEWART SAW HIS BOYS OFF WITH A SHOVE AND A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT...

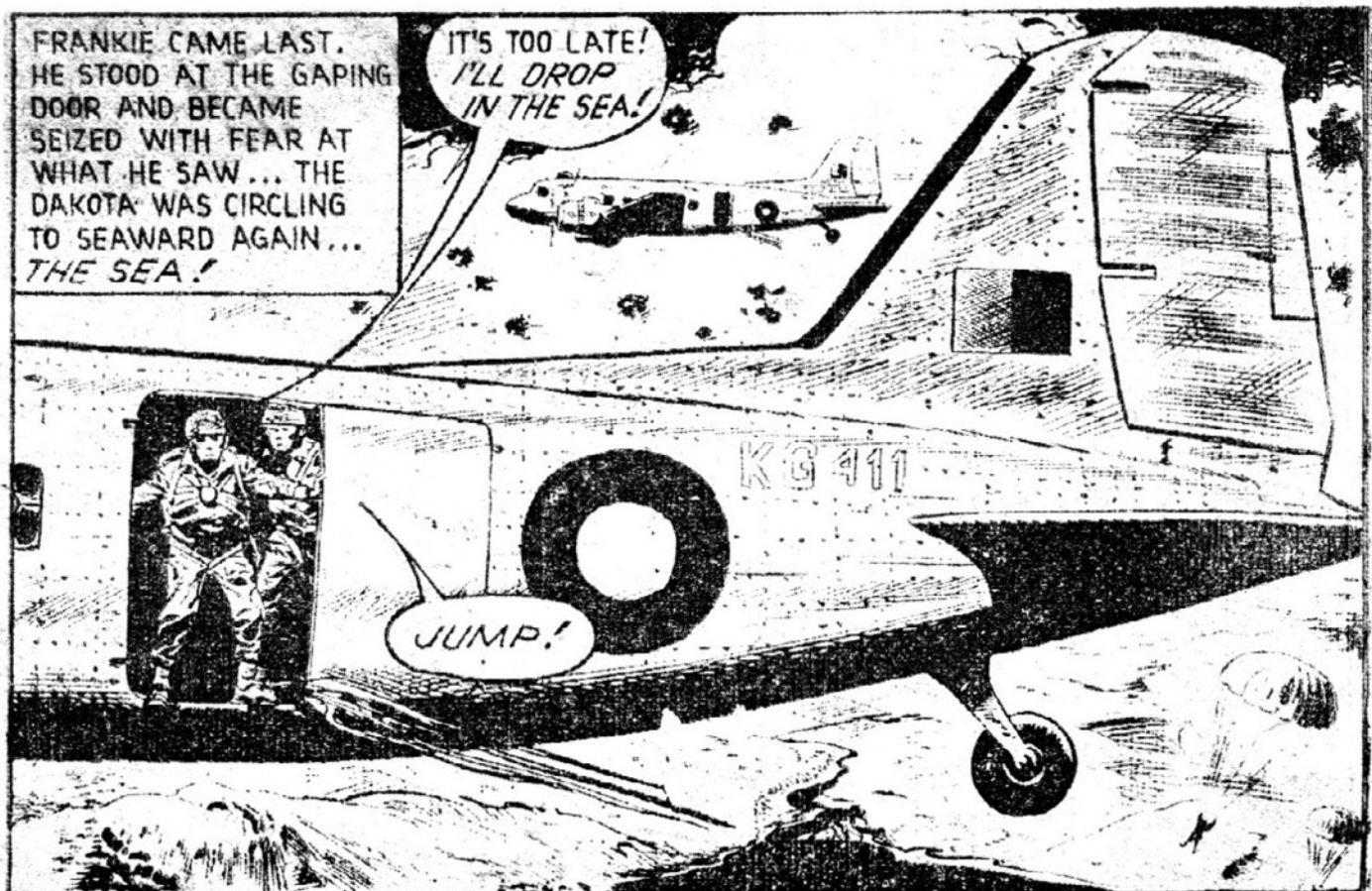
OKAY, FEET TOGETHER! NEXT!



FRANKIE CAME LAST. HE STOOD AT THE GAPING DOOR AND BECAME SEIZED WITH FEAR AT WHAT HE SAW... THE DAKOTA WAS CIRCLING TO SEAWARD AGAIN... THE SEA!

IT'S TOO LATE! I'LL DROP IN THE SEA!

JUMP!



ATTACKED BY THIS FEAR,  
FRANKIE FOUGHT TO STAY  
IN THE AIRCRAFT.

I WON'T JUMP!  
I WON'T!  
I CAN'T!

PULL YOURSELF  
TOGETHER,  
SMALL!



AFTER A USELESS STRUGGLE WITH THE HALF-  
CRAZED FRANKIE, ROB STEWART, NEVER  
PATIENT WITH FAILURE, PUSHED THE BOY  
ASIDE AND JUMPED ...



SHIVERING WITH REACTION, FRANKIE  
REELED BACK FROM THE DOOR ...



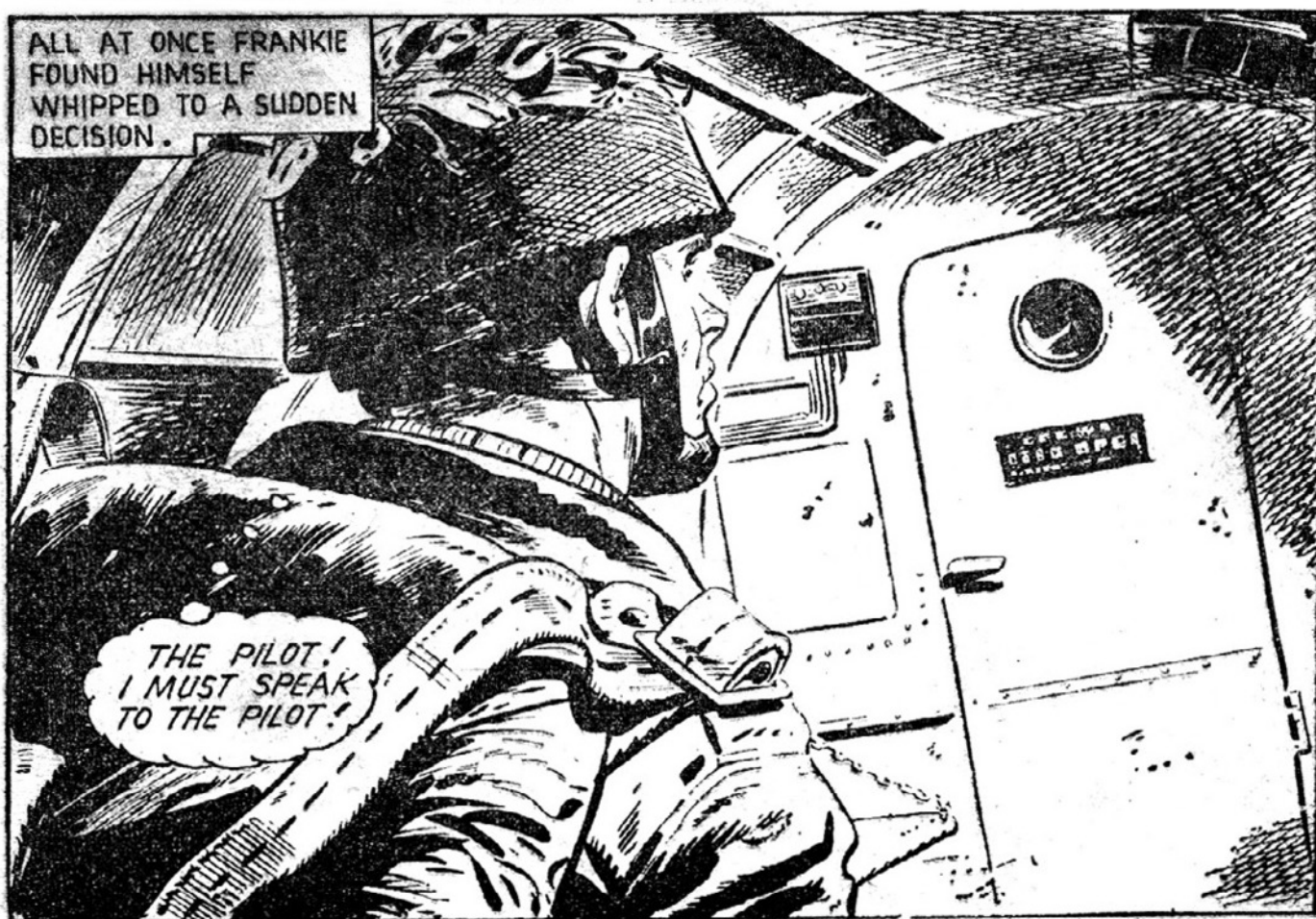


THEN SUDDENLY FRANKIE SOBERED UP AND THOUGHT IT OVER. HOW COULD HE POSSIBLY GO BACK AND FACE EVERYBODY... A COWARD?



ALL AT ONCE FRANKIE FOUND HIMSELF WHIPPED TO A SUDDEN DECISION.

THE PILOT!  
I MUST SPEAK  
TO THE PILOT!



IT WAS A VERY DESPERATE FRANKIE WHO LOOKED INTO THE PILOT'S CABIN ...

YOU'VE GOTTA GO  
BACK AGAIN!  
I MUST JUMP!  
*I MUST!*

WELL, BLOW  
ME DOWN!



MUTTERING UNDER HIS BREATH, THE PILOT SWUNG THE DAKOTA ONCE MORE OVERLAND. FRANKIE TOOK A DEEP BREATH, CLOSED HIS EYES ... **AND JUMPED!**



WITH A GASP OF RELIEF, FRANKIE HEARD THE WELCOME WHIP-CRACK OF HIS PARACHUTE OPENING ...





FRANKIE'S DEEP FEAR OF THE SEA LESSENERD AS HE FOUND HIMSELF FLOATING DOWN ON MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY...

COR - I CAN SEE THE CANAL AND BRIDGE AND EVERYTHING BUT I'M DROPPING TOO FAR INLAND.



MEANWHILE STEWART HAD THE TASK OF MUSTERING HIS MEN WHO HAD DROPPED IN SCATTERED UNITS...

EVERYBODY TO ME!



NEARBY, SERGEANT SPIGGOTT WAS GATHERING IN THE AMMUNITION PACKS, ONE OF WHICH HAD LODGED IN A TREE.

NEVER MIND THE JERRY BULLETS! UP THE TREE AND GET THAT AMMO!





OTHERS DROPPED TOO NEAR  
ENEMY REPLACEMENTS AND  
GOT A HOT RECEPTION...



AFTER SOME HARD FIGHTING, THE ENEMY'S FORWARD GUN POSITIONS WERE SILENCED. THEN STEWART GATHERED HIS MEN AND THEY CHARGED THE BRIDGE WITH HOMELY BUT BLOOD-CHILLING WAR CRIES ...





DESPITE SOME LOSSES, THE PARATROOPERS DROVE THE GERMANS BEFORE THEM AND WON THE BRIDGE. AT ONCE THEY TOOK UP DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ...



ENEMY SNIPERS WERE SOON ACTIVE, BUT THIS DID NOT STOP SERGEANT SPIGGOTT COMING FORWARD TO REPORT ...



BUT EVEN THE SERGEANT JUMPED  
WHEN THE NAVY SENT SOME  
SHELLS SCREAMING INTO  
ENEMY STRONGPOINTS . . .

WOW!

IT'S  
THE NAVY!



MEANWHILE FRANKIE  
HAD LANDED UNHURT  
AND WAS HURRYING  
TOWARDS THE SOUNDS  
OF DISTANT BATTLE...

I'VE GOTTA  
GET BACK  
WITH THE  
BOYS!





## Chapter 3. BEHIND ENEMY LINES

UNAWARE THAT HE WAS CLOSE TO ENEMY LINES, FRANKIE HURRIED ON TOWARDS THE DISTANT SOUNDS OF BATTLE, UNTIL, SUDDENLY, AS HE BROKE FROM THE COVER OF A WOOD, A LORRY ROUNDED A BEND IN THE ROAD AND A COMMAND RANG OUT IN GERMAN!



FRANKIE STOOD FIRM, GRIPPING HIS STEN GUN. AND AS THE GERMANS CHARGED TOWARDS HIM, FIRING WILDLY, HE SPRAYED THEM WITH BULLETS.



TWO MORE BURSTS FROM FRANKIE'S STEN RIPPED INTO THE GERMANS AND ONLY TWO MEN AND THEIR TRACKER-DOG WERE LEFT STANDING. WITH BULLETS BITING INTO THE TREES AND GROUND AROUND HIM, THE YOUNG PARATROOPER TURNED AND RAN INTO THE WOOD...



SUPERBLY FIT AFTER HIS ARDUOUS PARATROOP TRAINING, FRANKIE SOON OUT-DISTANCED THE PURSUING GERMANS. THEN HE CAME TO A STREAM, AND HE LEAPT STRAIGHT INTO IT...

AH... I'LL PADDLE ALONG THIS STREAM... AND PUT THAT NASTY-LOOKING HOUND OFF MY SCENT!





FRANKIE WAS IN GOOD SPIRITS AS HE SPLASHED ON THROUGH THE STREAM. HIS FIRST-AND SUCCESSFUL - BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY HAD GIVEN HIM SOME MUCH-NEEDED CONFIDENCE.



STILL WORKING TOWARDS THE FIRING, FRANKIE AT LAST CAME TO A CLEARING FROM WHERE HE COULD SEE THE BRIDGE.

THE BOYS ARE HAVING A TOUGH TIME THERE BY THE LOOK OF THINGS.



THE GERMAN MAJOR IN COMMAND OF THE BRIDGE DEFENCES REPORTED BACK TO HIS DIVISIONAL HEAD-QUARTERS ...

... WHERE GENERAL VON AULTMANN LISTENED WITH MOUNTING FURY ...



ANGERED BY THE PARATROOPERS' SURPRISE ATTACK, THE GERMAN GENERAL REACTED VIOLENTLY...

*DONNERBLITZEN!*  
ORDER OUT THE  
TENTH PANZER  
REGIMENT AT ONCE!  
THE ENEMY MUST  
BE CRUSHED!





THIS ORDER WAS FLASHED  
TO THE TREMEZZO CAMP,  
SOME FEW MILES DISTANT,  
WHERE THE PANZER  
REGIMENT SPRANG TO ARMS...

DER BRITISH  
PARA-TRUPPEN  
HAVE COME!



BACK AT THE BRIDGE THE ENEMY WAS  
FIERCELY COUNTER-ATTACKING  
THE BRITISH PARATROOPERS...



THE ENEMY FIRE BECOMING  
TOO HOT, STEWART WAS  
FORCED TO ORDER HIS MEN  
TO WITHDRAW...

ALL RIGHT, MEN, BACK  
OVER THE BRIDGE! THE  
SERGEANT AND I WILL  
KEEP YOU COVERED!  
GO!





STEWART AND SERGEANT SPIGGOTT KEPT THE GERMANS' HEADS DOWN WITH SHATTERING FIRE WHILE THEIR MEN SCRAMBLED BACK TO TAKE UP NEW DEFENSIVE POSITIONS...



ALL THIS WAS SEEN BY FRANKIE WHO WAS RUNNING FORWARD TO JOIN IN THE FIGHTING. BUT THEN HE STOPPED IN HIS TRACKS, FOR THE ENEMY MADE A SUDDEN CHARGE UPON HIS CAPTAIN AND SERGEANT SPIGGOTT AND TOOK THEM BOTH PRISONER...



AS THE CAPTAIN AND SERGEANT WERE LED AWAY, FRANKIE HEARD THE THROBBING BEAT OF HEAVY AIRCRAFT ENGINES... AND IN THE DISTANCE HE SAW PARATROOPS DESCENDING TO SUPPORT HIS OWN UNIT WHICH HAD NOW TAKEN UP NEW POSITIONS AND WAS FIGHTING BACK AT THE ENEMY.



WOW! THEY'RE JUST IN TIME!  
THE BOYS COULD DO WITH SOME  
HELP RIGHT NOW!

SCRAMBLING BACK IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FIGHTING, FRANKIE SUDDENLY DROPPED TO COVER AS A GERMAN TRUCK SPED ALONG A ROAD BELOW HIM TOWARDS A LARGE HOUSE. IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK SAT CAPTAIN STEWART AND SERGEANT SPIGGOTT, GUARDED BY THREE GERMANS.



THE CAPTAIN AND SERGEANT!  
THAT MUST BE THE GERMAN  
HEADQUARTERS THEY'RE  
BEING TAKEN TO!



WITH THE IDEA OF RESCUING HIS CAPTAIN AND SERGEANT SO AS TO MAKE AMENDS FOR HIS COWARDICE, FRANKIE SHINNED OVER THE VILLA WALL.



SNEAKING PAST THE GUARDS, HE PEERED IN AT A WINDOW...

ANSWER!  
WHERE AND WHEN  
WILL THE EIGHTH  
ARMY INVADE?



THEY WON'T GET THE  
CAPTAIN TO TALK,  
I KNOW.

BACK AT THE BRIDGE THE  
ARRIVAL OF MORE PARATROOPERS  
WAS THE SIGNAL FOR A FRESH  
ATTACK.





IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE GENERAL VON AULTMANN RECEIVED MORE BAD NEWS...

MEIN GENERAL,  
MORE PARA-TRUPPEN!  
THEY HAVE RECAPTURED  
THE BRIDGE!



THE GENERAL HAD BARELY RECOVERED FROM THIS SHOCK WHEN HE RECEIVED ANOTHER...

HERR GENERAL -  
THE EIGHTH ARMY  
HAS LANDED!  
THEY ARE  
APPROACHING  
FAST!

ACH - WE MUST  
LEAVE HERE  
AT ONCE!



FEVERISHLY THE GERMAN STAFF SET ABOUT ABANDONING THEIR HEADQUARTERS ...

LISTEN TO ME, HERR KAPITAN, NEVER THINK THAT I HAVE NOT PREPARED FOR THIS EVENTUALITY ...

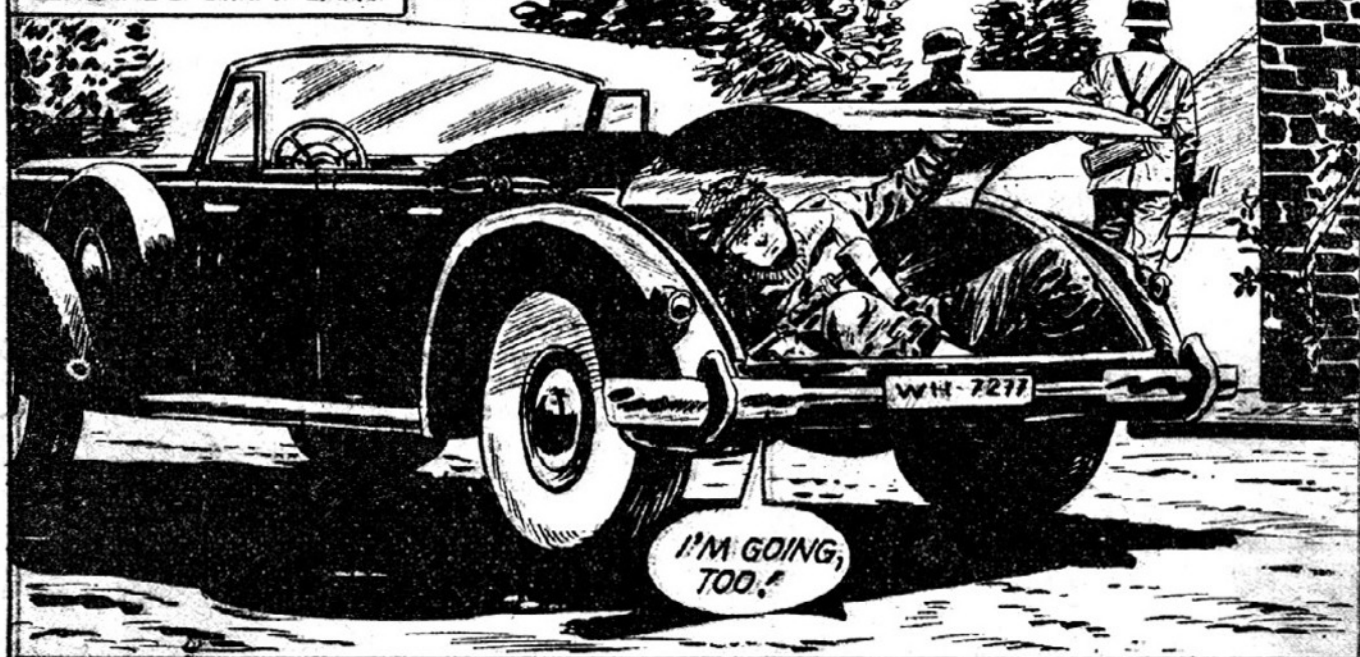


I INTEND TO STOP YOUR EIGHTH ARMY AT THE CANAL, THUS GIVING MY PANZER TANKS TIME TO ARRIVE. YOU WILL ACCOMPANY ME.





WHEN FRANKIE OVERHEARD THE GENERAL'S WORDS, HE MOVED SILENTLY AWAY FROM THE WINDOW, AND, SEIZING HIS CHANCE, CLIMBED INTO THE LUGGAGE BOOT OF THE GENERAL'S STAFF CAR.

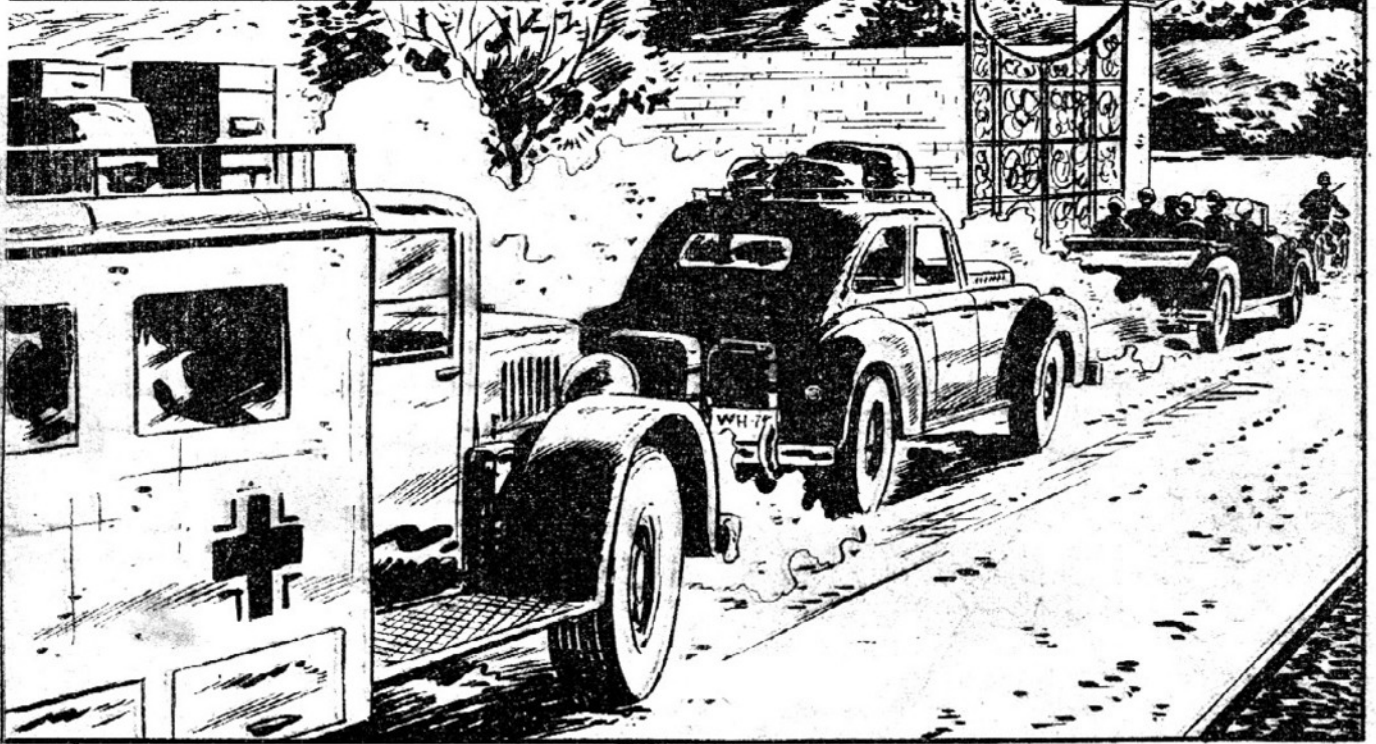


PRESENTLY VON AULTMANN EMERGED FROM THE HOUSE WITH THE TWO PARATROOPERS.

GET IN, HERR KAPITAN. BEFORE WE FALL BACK TO PREPARED POSITIONS I WILL SHOW YOU HOW I SHALL DEPRIVE YOUR ARMIES OF THE BRIDGE, ONCE AND FOR ALL!



THE CARS ROARED OFF AT SPEED,  
AND INSIDE THE LUGGAGE BOOT,  
FRANKIE RATTLED ABOUT LIKE  
A LONE PEA IN A POD.



MEANWHILE, THE REINFORCED  
PARATROOPERS HAD STORMED  
THE BRIDGE AND RECAPTURED  
IT. THE ENEMY SUFFERED  
HEAVY LOSSES.





THE EIGHTH ARMY, FLUSHED WITH TRIUMPH FROM ITS CONQUEST OF NORTH AFRICA, WAS BY NOW POURING MORE AND MORE MEN ON TO THE SICILIAN BEACHES.



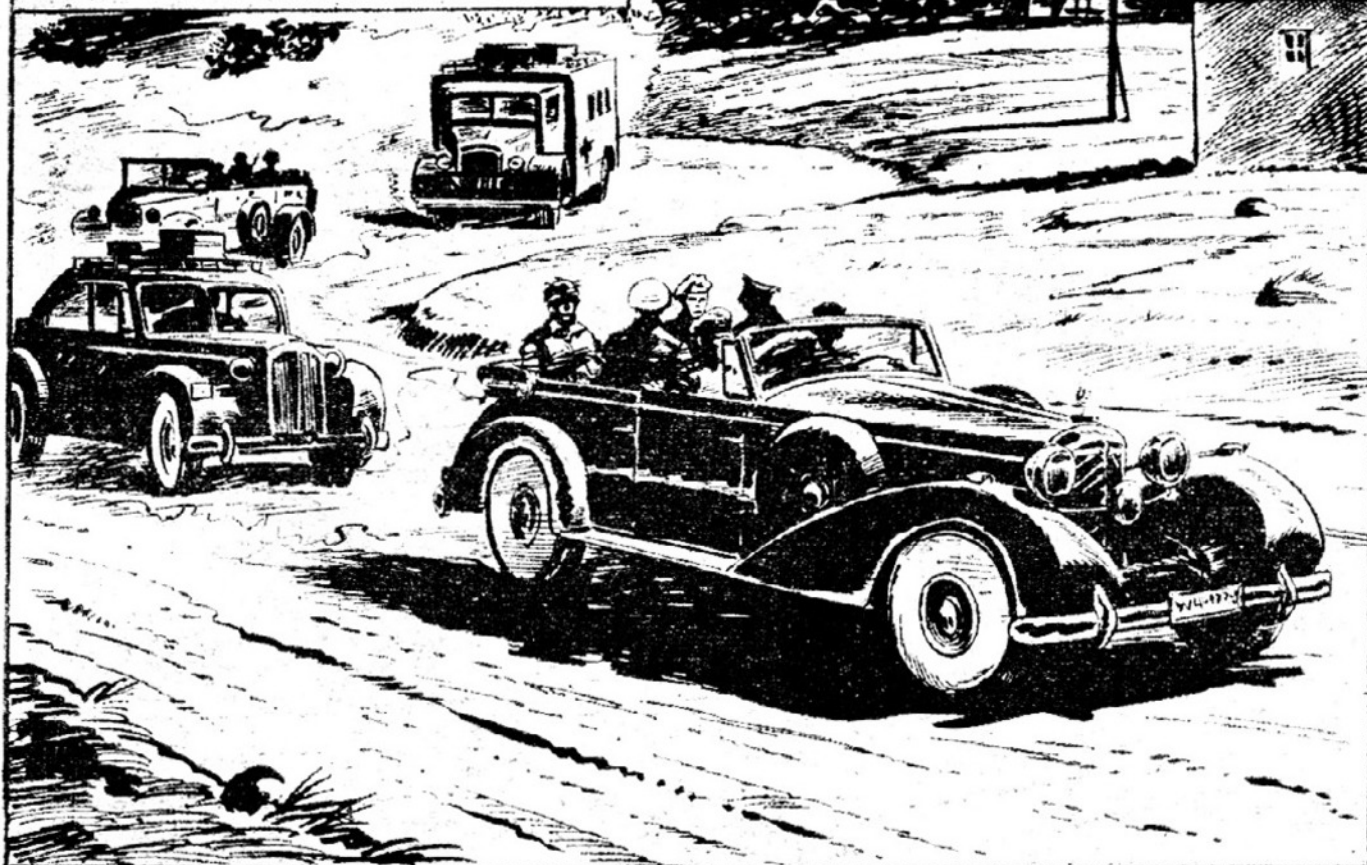
THE ARMoured SPEARHEAD WAS PUSHING ON TOWARDS THE BRIDGE WHICH THE PARATROOPERS HAD FOUGHT SO DESPERATELY TO CAPTURE, AND WHICH WAS SO VITAL TO THE ADVANCE OF THE BRITISH FORCES.



THE PARATROOPS, HAVING PUSHED BACK THE ENEMY, WERE BUSY MAKING NEW DEFENCE POSITIONS AROUND THE BRIDGE WHEN THEY HEARD THE FORWARD UNITS OF THE EIGHTH ARMY ATTACKING THE GERMAN LINES . . .



BUT BY NOW, GENERAL VON AULTMANN'S ENTOURAGE WAS MOVING SWIFTLY TOWARDS THE CANAL . . .





## Chapter 4. DEADLY CARGO

VON AULTMANN HALTED THE PROCESSION OF GERMAN STAFF CARS AT A POINT OVERLOOKING A GULLY THROUGH WHICH RUMBLED THE MIGHTY ARMOUR OF THE PANZER REGIMENT...

AHA! THERE GO MY PANZER TANKS, TO BAR THE WAY OF YOUR ARMIES DOWN BY THE BRIDGE, WHICH SHALL NOW BE DEMOLISHED. COME... YOU SHALL SEE!



THEY BOARDED THE GENERAL'S CAR AGAIN AND IT ROARED ON AHEAD OF THE SLOWER MOVING TANKS UNTIL THEY CAME INTO SIGHT OF THE CANAL . . .



PRESENTLY THE CARS STOPPED AND CAPTAIN STEWART AND THE SERGEANT WERE LED TO THE CANAL BANK...



WITH AN EVIL SMIRK, GENERAL VON AULTMANN POINTED TO A BARGE LOADED WITH HIGH EXPLOSIVES MOORED INSIDE THE LOCK...





SLOWLY AND CAUTIOUSLY, FRANKIE EMERGED FROM THE BOOT OF THE GERMAN STAFF CAR, HIS STEN GUN HELD READY FOR INSTANT ACTION.



THE GERMAN SOLDIER WHO HAD VOLUNTEERED TO GO WITH THE BARGE, LEAPED ABOARD AND VON AULTMANN SIGNALLED TO THE LOCK OPERATOR WAITING AT THE CONTROLS...



AS EVERYONE WATCHED, THE GATES SLOWLY SWUNG OPEN AND THE WATER FROM THE UPPER LEVEL BEGAN TO SURGE INTO THE LOCK ...

NO ONE CAN STOP MY PLAN NOW, GENTLEMEN ... SOON THE BRIDGE WILL BE BLOWN ... YOUR TROOPS WILL BE STOPPED ... AND DESTROYED BY OUR MIGHTY PANZERS!



BUT FRANKIE HAD OTHER IDEAS! WITH HIS STEN GUN SPURTING LEAD, HE CHARGED TOWARDS THE GERMAN OFFICERS ...

FRANKIE SMALL!



JUMP FOR THE BARGE, SIR! JUMP! I'LL DEAL WITH THESE JERRIES!



THE GERMAN SOLDIER ABOARD THE VESSEL RAISED HIS RIFLE... BUT TOO LATE! SERGEANT SPIGGOTT'S FIST LASHED OUT, SENDING HIM REELING INTO THE CANAL...



FRANKIE FOLLOWED HIS COMRADES, SENDING A LAST WICKED BURST OF FIRE AT THE GERMANS.



AS FRANKIE GLORIED IN HIS CAPTAIN'S PRAISE, THE BARGE BURST THROUGH THE LOCK GATES...



FRANKIE WAS UNAWARE OF THE AWFUL CARGO THAT THE BARGE WAS CARRYING...



BUT HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO THAT, SIR?





## Airborne

BUT THERE SEEMED NO WAY OF CONTROLLING THE DEATH LADEN BARGE. EVEN FRANKIE WITH ALL HIS BARGE EXPERIENCE WAS BAFFLED FOR A MOMENT.

NO RUDDER, SIR, SO WE CAN'T DRIVE HER INTO THE BANK.

TOO FAR TO JUMP ASHORE AND MAKE FAST. ANYWAY YOU'D NEVER STOP THIS PERISHER.



WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING... AND FAST! WE CAN'T BE VERY FAR FROM THE VIADUCT!

I CAN'T SEE NO ANCHOR, SIR, BUT THESE MOORING WEIGHTS MIGHT PUT THE BRAKES ON HER.



GOOD IDEA, SMALL... LET'S HEAVE THEM OVER!

OVER THEY GO!

LET'S HOPE IT WORKS!



THE WEIGHTS DID THE TRICK!  
THE DYNAMITE-PACKED  
BARGE BEGAN TO SLOW  
DOWN.

GOOD, WE'RE  
SLOWING! WHAT  
NEXT?

SOMEONE'S GOT TO  
GET TO THE VIADUCT  
WITH THE EXPLOSIVE!

AS SERGEANT SPIGGOTT SPOKE,  
CAPTAIN STEWART POINTED  
AHEAD...

LOOK, THERE'S THE  
VIADUCT ALREADY! BRING  
OUT SOME OF THAT  
EXPLOSIVE AND A FUSE,  
SERGEANT... QUICKLY!

RIGHT,  
SIR!





WHILE THE SERGEANT WAS PREPARING THE EXPLOSIVE, CAPTAIN STEWART TURNED TO FRANKIE.

NOW, SMALL, IT'S GOING TO BE YOUR JOB TO SWIM TO THE VIADUCT AND LAY THE EXPLOSIVE. SERGEANT SPIGGOTT AND I WILL STAY ON HERE TILL THE LAST MOMENT AND RELEASE THE BRAKES ON THE BARGE. THEN WE'LL JOIN YOU ON THE VIADUCT.

ME 5-SWIM, SIR! GOSH!

FRANKIE'S FACE WAS PALE AS THE SERGEANT CAME FORWARD WITH A WATERTIGHT TIN CONTAINING STICKS OF DYNAMITE AND A FUSE.

THE DYNAMITE WILL KEEP DRY IN THIS TIN, SIR!

FINE, SERGEANT. NOW LISTEN, SMALL, YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO THAT AQUEDUCT AND SET OFF A CHARGE TO BLOW UP THE BARGE WHEN IT REACHES THERE. THEN THE WHOLE VIADUCT WILL COLLAPSE AND THE PANZERS WON'T BE ABLE TO GET THROUGH, ON THE ROAD BELOW. ARE YOU GAME?

FIGHTING BACK HIS PARALYSING FEAR OF WATER FRANKIE GULPED OUT HIS ANSWER.

YES, SIR... LEAVE IT TO ME!

GOOD LAD!

TUCKING THE TIN OF EXPLOSIVE INSIDE HIS JACKET, FRANKIE PREPARED TO LEAVE THE BARGE.



IN THE SPLIT-SECOND BEFORE HE JUMPED, FRANKIE HAD TWO THOUGHTS. HE HAD PAID HIS DEBT FOR HIS COWARDICE WHEN HE REFUSED TO JUMP... AND NOW THERE WAS A DEBT TO PAY HIMSELF... *THE CHALLENGE TO OVERCOME HIS FEAR OF WATER!*



ALTHOUGH THE WATER LOOKED BLACK AND FATHOMLESS, FILLING HIM WITH DREAD, FRANKIE JUMPED ...





## Chapter 5. RACE AGAINST TIME

AFTER THE FIRST NUMBING SHOCK, FRANKIE WAS EXCITED TO FIND HIMSELF FLOATING SERENELY AWAY FROM THE BARGE... BORNE ALONG BY THE CURRENT.

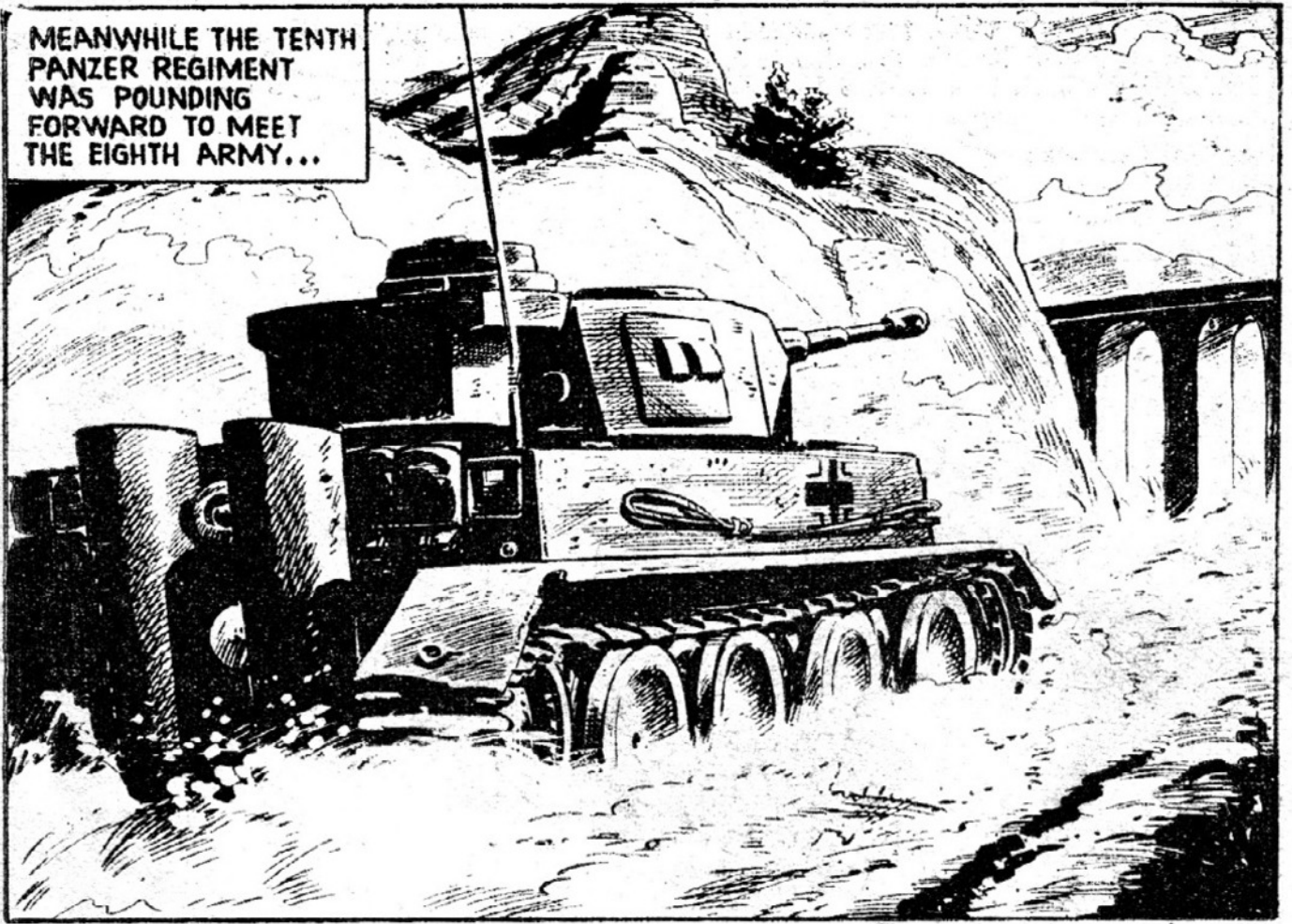


WHILE FRANKIE WAS BEING SWEEPED ON TOWARDS THE VIADUCT, STEWART AND SPIGGOTT BEGAN UNFASTENING SOME OF THE TACKLE WHICH HELD THE BARGE BACK IN THE FAST-FLOWING WATER.



DON'T RELEASE THE WEIGHTS YET, SERGEANT. WE'VE GOT TO GIVE THAT YOUNGSTER PLENTY OF TIME!

MEANWHILE THE TENTH  
PANZER REGIMENT  
WAS POUNDING  
FORWARD TO MEET  
THE EIGHTH ARMY...



REACHING THE AQUEDUCT,  
FRANKIE FOUGHT HIS  
WAY TO THE BANK AND  
CRAWLED UP IT.





FRANKIE LOOKED OVER THE PARAPET OF THE VIADUCT TO SEE A LONG COLUMN OF GERMAN TANKS APPROACHING.



THE JERRY TANKS!  
GOSH! I'VE GOT TO  
WORK FAST... AND THE  
OTHERS HAD BETTER HURRY  
IF WE'RE GOING TO STOP 'EM  
GETTING THROUGH!

RACING AGAINST TIME, FRANKIE FRANTICALLY DUG A HOLE TO TAKE THE CHARGE OF EXPLOSIVE.

NOW TO LAY THE CHARGE AND GET THE FUSE READY FOR LIGHTING. THE BARGE WILL BE ALONG SOON.



I'LL SHOVE THE TIN IN AN' ALL... JUST FOR LUCK!



MEANWHILE, CAPTAIN STEWART AND SERGEANT SPIGGOTT, HAVING RELEASED THE WEIGHTS HOLDING BACK THE BARGE, HAD LEAPED INTO THE CANAL AND WERE SWIMMING FOR THE BANK...

I HOPE SMALL HAS GOT THAT DYNAMITE LAID! COME ON, SERGEANT, PUT A SPURT ON! WE'VE GOT TO RACE THAT BOATLOAD OF EXPLOSIVES!



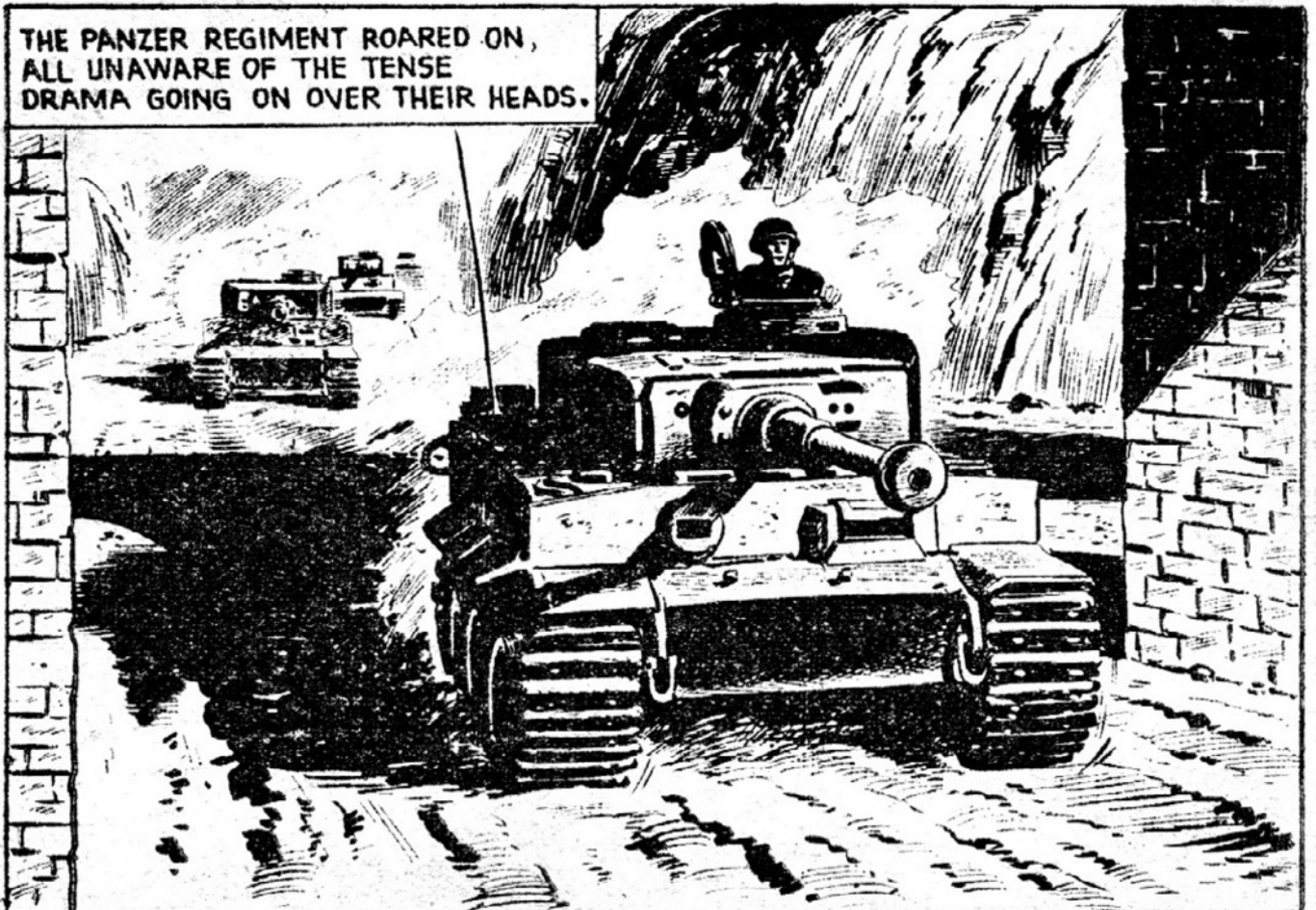


FRANKIE, WITH THE FUSE  
READY FOR LIGHTING,  
SAW HIS COMRADES  
SWIMMING TOWARDS  
THE BANK.

HURRY... THE BARGE IS  
COMING UP FAST AND THE  
JERRY TANKS ARE  
ALREADY HERE!



THE PANZER REGIMENT ROARED ON,  
ALL UNAWARE OF THE TENSE  
DRAMA GOING ON OVER THEIR HEADS.



HURRIEDLY STEWART AND SPIGGOTT  
SCRAMBLED ASHORE... AND  
FRANKIE LIT THE FUSE...

GET OUT OF HERE  
AS QUICKLY AS YOU  
CAN NOW!



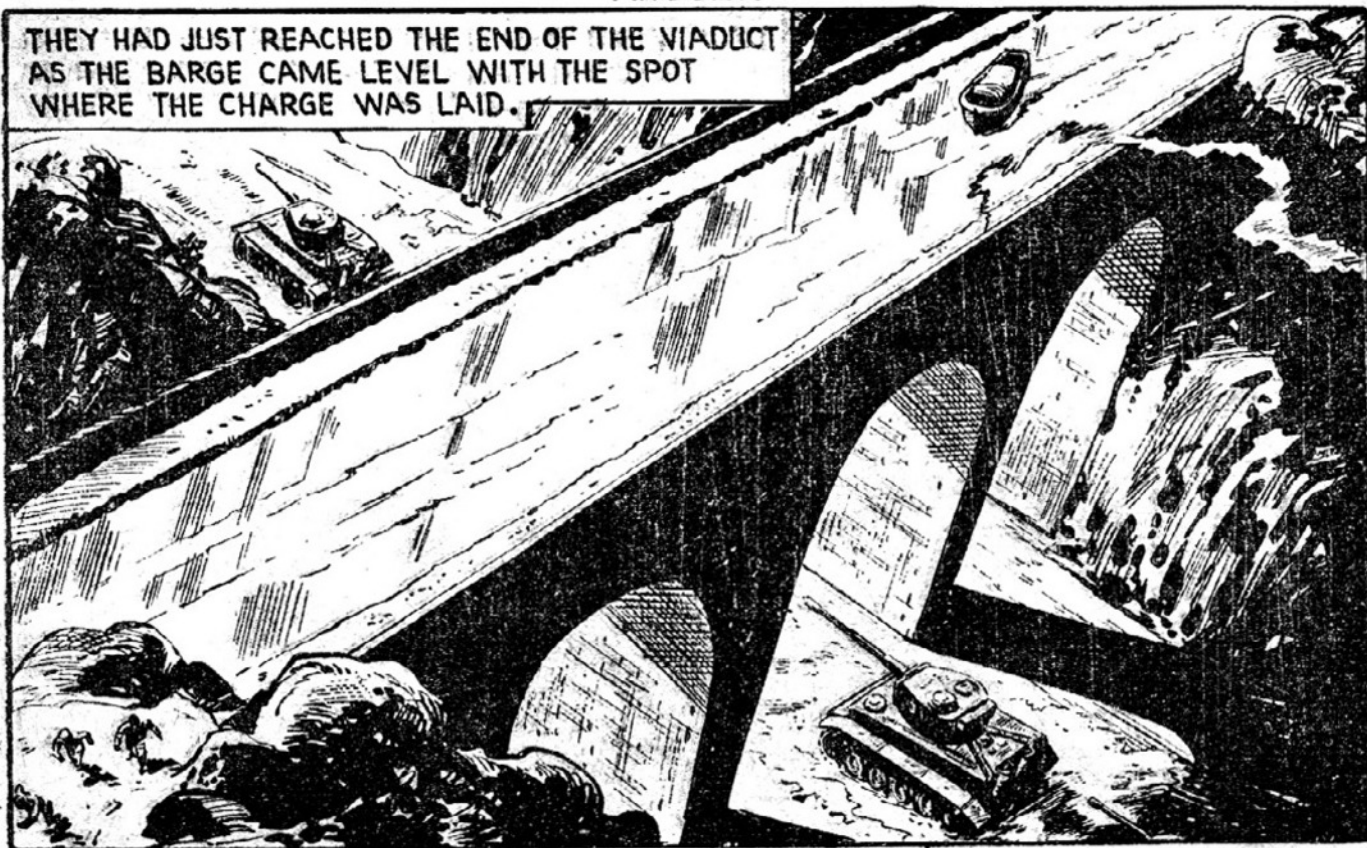
THE THREE PARATROOPERS RAN FOR  
THEIR LIVES OVER THE VIADUCT...

MAKE FOR THOSE ROCKS  
ALONG THE BANK AND  
TAKE COVER THERE!





THEY HAD JUST REACHED THE END OF THE VIADUCT AS THE BARGE CAME LEVEL WITH THE SPOT WHERE THE CHARGE WAS LAID.



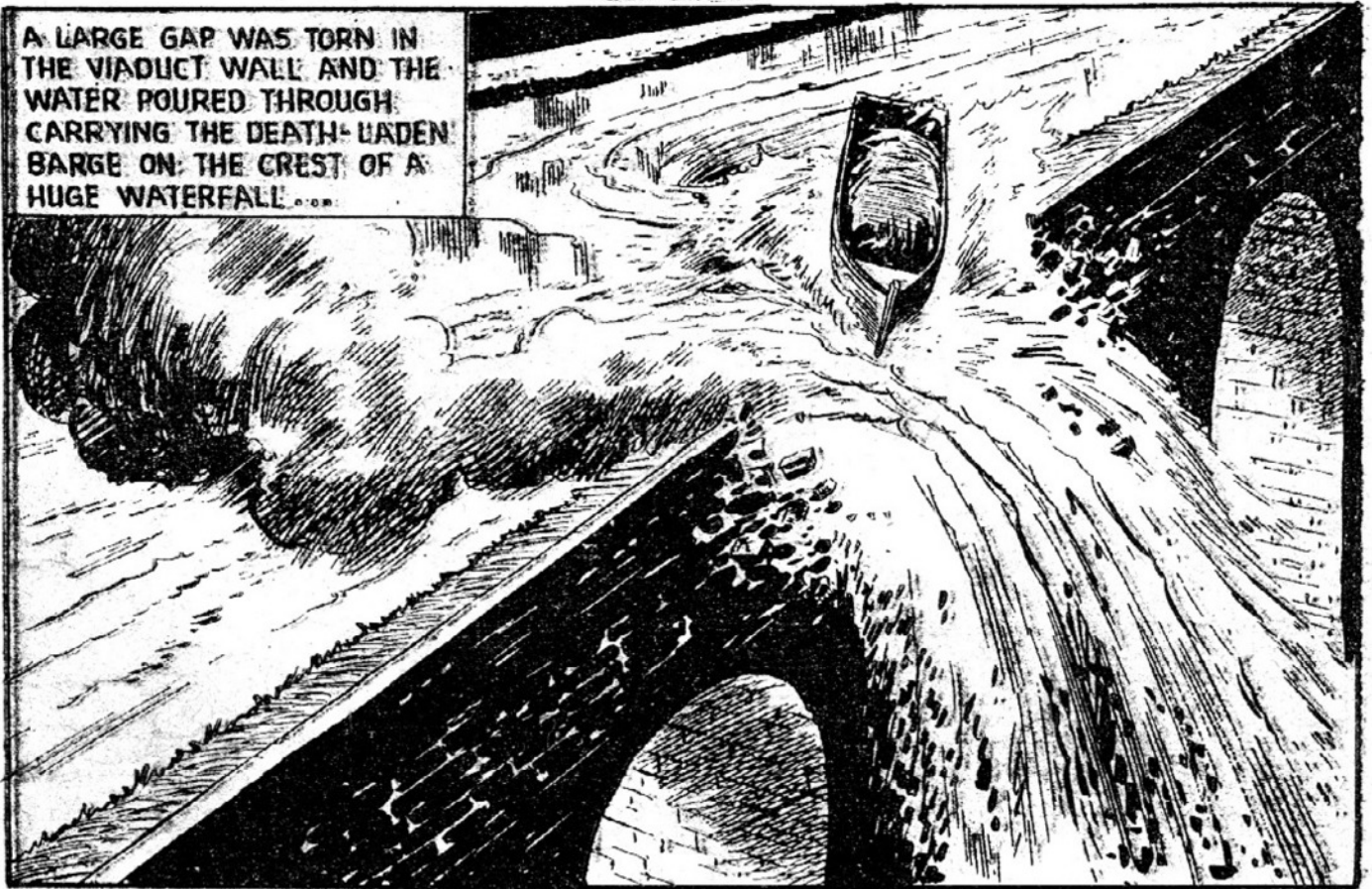
THE FUSE SPLUTTERED FURIOUSLY AS THE BARGE DRIFTED BY ...



THEN, AS THE GERMAN TANKS RUMBLED UNDER THE VIADUCT, THE FUSE BURNED UP TO THE DYNAMITE AND ...



A LARGE GAP WAS TORN IN THE VIADUCT WALL AND THE WATER POURED THROUGH CARRYING THE DEATH-LADEN BARGE ON THE CREST OF A HUGE WATERFALL.

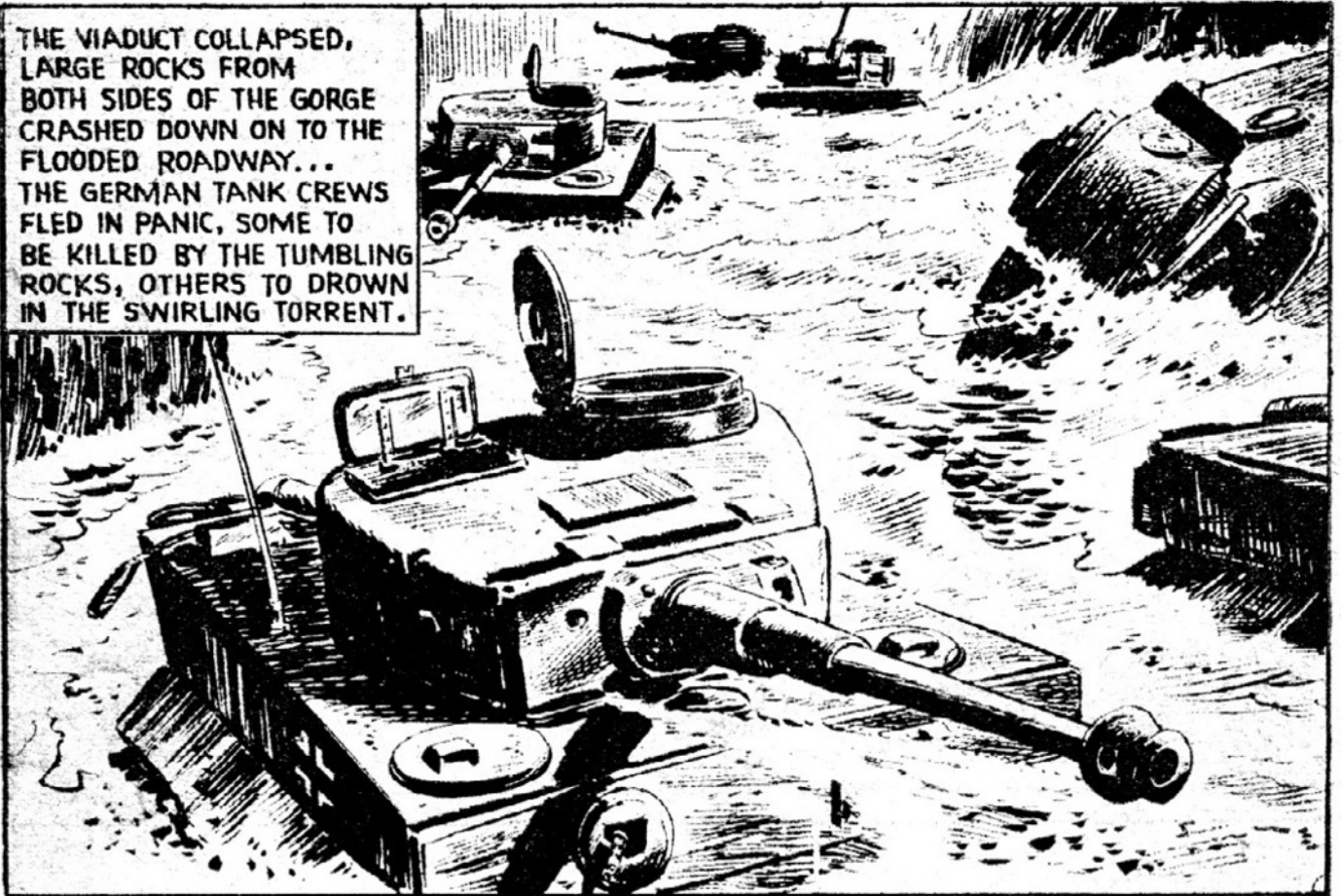




THE NEXT MOMENT  
THE BARGE SLAMMED  
INTO THE FLOODED  
GORGE BELOW AND  
EXPLODED WITH A  
SHATTERING ROAR...



THE VIADUCT COLLAPSED, LARGE ROCKS FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE GORGE CRASHED DOWN ON TO THE FLOODED ROADWAY... THE GERMAN TANK CREWS FLED IN PANIC, SOME TO BE KILLED BY THE TUMBLING ROCKS, OTHERS TO DROWN IN THE SWIRLING TORRENT.



STEWART AND HIS TWO COMRADES LET OUT A ROUSING CHEER AS THEY LOOKED DOWN UPON THE DESTRUCTION. THINGS HAD NOT TURNED OUT QUITE AS THEY HAD PLANNED, FOR THE BARGE HAD EXPLODED ON THE ROAD INSTEAD OF BEING BLOWN UP ON THE VIADUCT. BUT THE RESULTS WERE BETTER THAN THEY HAD EXPECTED!



TWO TARGETS  
WITH ONE SHOT!

AYE. I DIDN'T DREAM  
THINGS WOULD GO UP  
JUST AS JERRY WAS  
PASSING BELOW!



THEN THE THREE  
PARATROOPERS  
RACED IN THE  
DIRECTION OF  
THE BRIDGE...

I CAN HEAR  
CHEERING!

THE ARMY MUST  
HAVE ARRIVED!



THEY COULD NOT REACH THEIR BROTHERS IN ARMS QUICK ENOUGH, AND THE SIGHT  
OF A BARGE HORSE SUGGESTED A MEANS OF TRANSPORT.

A BARGE HORSE!

ALL ABOARD,  
SERGEANT!



IN NEXT TO NO TIME,  
SERGEANT SPIGGOTT  
HAD CAPTURED THE  
BARGE HORSE AND  
THE THREE  
PARATROOPERS  
WERE ON ITS BACK.



WITH A SHRILL WHINNY THE HORSE BROKE INTO A GALLOP  
AND REACHED THE HARD-WON BRIDGE AS THE ADVANCING  
TROOPS CROSSED IN TRIUMPH...

GIDDAP!  
GIDDAP!

DON'T SPARE  
THE HORSE POWER,  
SERGEANT!





CHEERFULLY UNAWARE OF THE DISASTER SO NARROWLY AVERTED, THE EIGHTH ARMY SWEEP OVER THE HARD-WON BRIDGE AND PURSUED ITS ALL-CONQUERING MARCH. ITS GIGANTIC TASK OF DRIVING THE ENEMY FIRST OUT OF AFRICA, THEN SICILY, THEN IN THREE MORE MONTHS OUT OF ITALY, HAD DAUNTED NONE, LEAST OF ALL THOSE WHO HAD HELPED TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE... THE MATCHLESS PARATROOPERS.



AND AS HE WATCHED, FRANKIE SMALL FELT A SURGE OF PRIDE AT HAVING PROVED HIMSELF WORTHY OF THIS GALLANT BAND OF MEN... *THESE RED DEVILS OF THE SKIES... THE AIRBORNE DIVISION.*

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